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A City That Turns Garbage Into Energy Copes With a Shortage

By JOHN TAGLIABUE

OSLO — This is a city that imports garbage. Some comes from England, some from Ireland. Some is from neighboring Sweden. It even has designs on the American market.

“I’d like to take some from the United States,” said Pal Mikkelsen, in his office at a huge plant on the edge of town that turns garbage into heat and electricity. “Sea transport is cheap.”

Oslo, a recycling-friendly place where roughly half the city and most of its schools are heated by burning garbage — household trash, industrial waste, even toxic and dangerous waste from hospitals and drug arrests — has a problem: it has literally run out of garbage to burn.

The problem is not unique to Oslo, a city of 1.4 million people. Across Northern Europe, where the practice of burning garbage to generate heat and electricity has exploded in recent decades, demand for trash far outstrips supply. “Northern Europe has a huge generating capacity,” said Mr. Mikkelsen, 50, a mechanical engineer who for the last year has been the managing director of Oslo’s waste-to-energy agency.

Yet the fastidious population of Northern Europe produces only about 150 million tons of waste a year, he said, far too little to supply incinerating plants that can handle more than 700 million tons. “And the Swedes continue to build” more plants, he said, a look of exasperation on his face, “as do Austria and Germany.”

Stockholm, to the east, has become such a competitor that it has even managed to persuade some Norwegian municipalities to deliver their waste there. By ship and by truck, countless tons of garbage make their way from regions that have an excess to others that have the capacity to burn it and produce energy.

“There’s a European waste market — it’s a commodity,” said Hege Rooth Olbergsveen, the senior adviser to Oslo’s waste recovery program. “It’s a growing market.”

Most people approve of the idea. “Yes, absolutely,” said Terje Worren, 36, a software consultant, who admitted to heating his house with oil and his water with electricity. “It utilizes waste in a good away.”

The English like it, too, though they are not big players in the garbage-for-energy industry. The Yorkshire-based company that handles garbage collection for cities like Leeds, in the north of England, now ships as much as 1,000 tons a month of garbage — or, since the bad stuff has been sorted out, “refuse-derived fuel” — to countries in Northern Europe, including Norway, according to Donna Cox, a Leeds city spokeswoman.

A British tax on landfill makes it cheaper to send it to places like Oslo. “It helps us in reducing the escalating costs of the landfill tax,” Ms. Cox wrote in an e-mail.

For some, it might seem bizarre that Oslo would resort to importing garbage to produce energy. Norway ranks among the world’s 10 largest exporters of oil and gas, and has abundant coal reserves and a network of more than 1,100 hydroelectric plants in its water-rich mountains. Yet Mr. Mikkelsen said garbage burning was “a game of renewable energy, to reduce the use of fossil fuels.”

Of course, other areas of Europe are producing abundant amounts of garbage, including southern Italy, where cities like Naples paid towns in Germany and the Netherlands to accept garbage, helping to defuse a Neapolitan garbage crisis. Yet though Oslo considered the Italian garbage, it preferred to stick with what it said was the cleaner and safer English waste. “It’s a sensitive question,” Mr. Mikkelsen said.

Garbage may be, well, garbage in some parts of the world, but in Oslo it is very high-tech. Households separate their garbage, putting food waste in green plastic bags, plastics in blue bags and glass elsewhere. The bags are handed out free at groceries and other stores.

The larger of Mr. Mikkelsen’s two waste-to-energy plants uses computerized sensors to separate the color-coded garbage bags that race across conveyor belts and into incinerators. The building’s curved exterior, with lighting that is visible from a long distance to motorists driving by, competes architecturally with Oslo’s striking new opera house.

Still, not everybody is comfortable with this garbage addiction. “From an environmental point of view, it’s a huge problem,” said Lars Haltbrekken, the chairman of Norway’s oldest environmental group, an affiliate of the Friends of the Earth. “There is pressure to produce more and more waste, as long as there is this overcapacity.”

In a hierarchy of environmental goals, Mr. Haltbrekken said, producing less garbage should take first place, while generating energy from garbage should be at the bottom. “The problem is that our lowest priority conflicts with our highest one,” he said.

“So now we import waste from Leeds and other places, and we also had discussions with Naples,” he added. “We said, ‘O.K., so we’re helping the Neapolitans,’ but that’s not a long-term strategy.”

Maybe not, city planners say, but for now it is a necessity. “Recycling and energy recovery have to go hand in hand,” said Ms. Rooth Olbergsveen, of the city’s waste recovery agency. Recycling has made strides, she said, and the separation of organic garbage, like food waste, has begun enabling Oslo to produce biogas, which is now powering some buses in downtown Oslo.

Mr. Haltbrekken acknowledged that he does not benefit from garbage-generated energy. His home near the center of town, built about 1890, is heated by burning wood pellets, and his water is heated electrically. In general, he said, Friends of the Earth supports the city’s environmental goals.

Yet he added, “In the short-term view, of course, it’s better to burn the garbage in Oslo than to leave it in Leeds or Bristol.”

But “in the long term,” he said, “no.”

CHARLESTON GAZETTE

Op-Ed:

May 1, 2013

Julian Martin: Coal 101 hardly unbiased

A teacher presented a unit on coal to her ninth-grade classes. She invited guest speakers to present four days of the positive aspects of coal. To offer a different perspective, she asked a fellow teacher if he knew any "tree huggers," as she put it.

Complying with her request, the second teacher invited two of us "tree huggers" to "balance" the coal industry perspective. We were given only one day compared to the four days of coal industry perspective. Besides the four days of corporate presentations there were also classroom days in which materials and activities from the Coal Association's CEDAR program were presented to the students.

It is faint praise to say that this is the only time I know of that any alternative perspective to the coal industry has been offered in counties where CEDAR has been allowed in the classroom. That said, it should be noted that the ninth-grade teacher interrupted our presentation with coal industry propaganda that the students had already been exposed to.

CEDAR stands for Coal Education Development and Resource. As stated on their website, "CEDAR's mission is to facilitate the increase of knowledge and understanding of the many benefits the coal industry provides in daily lives by providing financial resources and coal education materials to implement its study in the school curriculum."

The Coal Association believes that, "Our coal industry is facing the biggest reclamation challenge of our history. And that job is to reclaim the understanding and support of our state and nation's citizenry." Reading that, I figured that if the reclamation of their reputation is anything like how they reclaim mountains and valleys, then we can look for the truth to have its head lopped off and covered with tons of coal waste.

The Coal Association continues, "Many of us in the coal industry believe the solution now, and over the long term, to many of the current issues facing coal can be achieved through better education." In other words get the coal company spin into classrooms.

Through CEDAR, coal companies are dumping money into this project by "providing financial resources and coal education materials for implementation in school curriculum grades K thru 12."

There are many benefits that the coal industry provides. But it is not part of school curriculum to extol the "many benefits" of any industry. Promoting the many benefits of coal qualifies CEDAR as one-sided propaganda, not education.

Does anyone believe that a coal company program could possibly include an objective presentation of the never-ending problems with coal mining, especially when its mission is to promote the many benefits of coal?

The killing of more than 20,000 West Virginia miners is not a "benefit" the coal companies are likely to present. Nor is the coughing death of black lung, or the increased rates of terrible diseases in coal-producing counties and the massive and irreversible destruction of our environment. Will selenium-poisoned fish with both eyes on one side of their heads and curved spines be presented as a benefit of coal?

How much of the violent reaction of coal companies to union organization will fall under the heading of the many benefits of coal? Will the trickery of the coal companies, which culminates in retired miners and widows losing their retirement benefits, be included as a benefit of coal?

The Friends of Coal Ladies Auxiliary wants CEDAR mandatory in every school in the state. That's the ticket -- the coal companies mandating school curriculum.

Martin, of Charleston, is a former chemistry teacher in the Peace Corps and Lincoln County.

A little bit of news on power plant sales

May 1, 2013 by Ken Ward Jr.

FirstEnergy's Harrison Power Station near Haywood is among the state's largest coal-fired power plants. Ohio-based FirstEnergy wants to sell the plant to a West Virginia

subsidiary, and Mountain State customers would fund the purchase through increased electricity bills. (FirstEnergy photo)

There's been a little bit of news over the last few days in the two big cases involving major power companies trying to transfer ownership of several of their coal-fired power plants to West Virginia subsidiaries — an issue that promises to only heat up as hearings scheduled for May and July before the state Public Service Commission approach.

First, the State Journal reported today:

In its petitions for West Virginia and Virginia approval to transfer parts of the Amos and Mitchell coal-fired power stations from Ohio subsidiaries to Appalachian Power, AEP announced May 1 that federal regulators have no objection.

While AEP did issue a statement announcing the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's decision, the State Journal put an unfortunate headline on its story saying "Feds clear way for transfer of Amos and Mitchell to ApCO." I'm not sure there's really all that much to this FERC decision. The real ball game is before the state Public Service Commission.

And in the other power plant sale case, involving FirstEnergy's Harrison Power Station, a huge collection of testimony from PSC staff, the consumer advocate and various intervening parties hit the commission on Friday. You can read it all yourself by visiting the PSC's website and searching for Case 12-1571-E-PC.

Also over at the State Journal, Pam Kasey wrote up one story that focused on the filing from PSC consumer advocate Byron Harris. Pam reports:

Cynical observers have suggested this proposal, and a similar proposal from Appalachian Power, are motivated for the two Ohio-based utility companies by a desire to move coal-fired power assets out of their Ohio utilities' portfolios, where deregulation now forces them to compete, to West Virginia's regulated market where the commission will guarantee the companies a return from ratepayers for the coming several decades.

"The transaction represents an effort to bail out the companies' unregulated affiliates," said PSC Consumer Advocate Byron Harris flatly in his testimony.

An alternative plan with energy efficiency and demand response, plus purchases from the market as needed, would cost \$510 million less through 2034 than the proposal, in Schlissel's analysis.

"Obtaining needed capacity and energy from the Harrison plant through the proposed (generation resource transaction) is the most expensive option," he said.

And on his Power Line blog, Bill Howley has several posts (see [here](#) and [here](#)), including one that that argues, WV Coal Not an Issue in Harrison Case, FE Could Care Less About WV:

Mon Power could care less what coal the company uses, as long as it is cheapest and meets the company's needs, not those of WV ... So, if the WV PSC approves the FE Harrison plant scheme, the Harrison plant will not operate any differently from the way it operates now, when 80% of the plant sells power on the open market using FE's non-utility generating company.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 1, 2013

THE STATE JOURNAL

'No timetable' on NY fracking decision

Posted: May 01, 2013 1:54 PM EDT Updated: May 01, 2013 1:54 PM EDT

ALBANY, NY (AP) — Months after the Cuomo administration promised a decision "within weeks" on whether to allow hydraulic fracturing for natural gas, it now says there's "no timetable for a decision."

State officials say recent meetings with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have provided new information that's factoring into the state health review.

Health commissioner Dr. Nirav Shah says Wednesday he recently met with EPA officials in Washington to discuss the drilling technology known as "fracking."

It's fiercely opposed by environmental groups and Cuomo's Democratic base. Supporters of hydraulic fracturing to extract gas from upstate shale deposits say it will provide a long-needed economic boost to the region.

Chesapeake 'off to a strong start' in 2013

Posted: May 01, 2013 9:33 AM EDT Updated: May 01, 2013 11:32 AM EDT

By Taylor Kuykendall,

Chesapeake Energy, one of the largest stakeholders in the Marcellus shale gas play, says first quarter earnings suggest a good year.

The quarter is the first reported since founder and former CEO Aubrey McClendon stepped down amid controversy over financial practices at the natural gas company. Chesapeake Energy conducted an internal investigation of McClendon and found no intentional wrongdoing.

Steven C. Dixon, Chesapeake's acting CEO, said the company is "off to a strong start in 2013."

"We are beginning to see the benefits of our operational strategy shift from identifying and capturing new assets to developing our extensive existing assets and entering a new era of shareholder value realization," Dixon said. "Our operational focus on the core of the core is enabling our drilling program to increasingly target the best reservoir rock in each of our key plays. We are capitalizing on pad drilling efficiencies wherever possible and leveraging our substantial investments in roads, well pads, gathering lines, and compression and processing facilities. As a result, we are generating more efficient production growth, stronger cash flow and better returns on capital."

Chesapeake reported net income available to common stockholders of \$15 million. The company's adjusted earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization was \$1.13 billion, an increase of 35 percent year over year.

Daily production is also up, about 9 percent from the same quarter in 2012. Chesapeake produced about 3 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day and about 157,000 barrels of oil and natural gas liquids.

"We plan to devote more than 80 percent of our total capital expenditures to drilling and completion activities in 2013 as compared to an average of approximately 50 percent over the last three years," said Domenic J. Dell'Osso Jr., Chesapeake's CFO. "Going forward, we expect this capex trend to continue to improve as we capitalize on our past investments in leasehold, oilfield services and other assets to deliver meaningful improvements in returns on capital."

Seizing Opportunity in W.Va.

May 2, 2013

By BERI FOX , The Intelligencer / Wheeling News-Register

West Virginia is poised to make a major comeback in manufacturing jobs, and affordable, domestic energy will play a key role in that resurgence.

Our company, Marble King in Paden City, is currently one of just four glass manufacturers in the Mountain State, a place that once saw 240 companies employ more people than any other single sector. Only two marble manufacturers have survived in the entire nation, as low-priced imports have taken away much of the market.

We need to level the playing field, and continuing to provide affordable natural gas from the Marcellus Shale must be part of our long-term strategy to "reshore" our manufacturing jobs and rejuvenate our goods-producing sector. West Virginia is incredibly fortunate to be at the epicenter of this game-changing discovery, and it already is helping companies from the Northern Panhandle to the Kanawha Valley grow their business and expand their employment.

Manufacturing jobs must be a significant part of any successful economy. Conservative estimates indicate that for every manufacturing job that exists, four more are created to support it. Our state once had hundreds of thousands of these valuable jobs, but today that figure has dropped to fewer than 50,000 - not enough to fill Mountaineer Field.

Founded in 1949, Marble King has worked hard to survive in a tough environment, and today we still produce 1 million marbles every day that are found in everything from games and children's toys to industrial uses. Our marbles were used in movies such as "Home Alone" and "The Goonies," and I'm proud to have represented our state and company on television, including "The Colbert Report," "The Martha Stewart Show," CNN and Fox Business News.

Marble King has received export awards from the U.S. Department of Commerce and state of West Virginia, and our business continues to compete on a global stage.

For that to continue, however, we must have a long-term supply of affordable energy such as the Marcellus Shale offers.

Currently, our energy costs alone represent three-quarters of what it costs Chinese manufacturers to produce and ship marbles to the United States.

Cheap natural gas will make a significant difference in our production costs, and we encourage the federal government to pass tax credits that help offset price differences and encourage domestic purchases.

We have the opportunity to recapture those long-lost manufacturing jobs and again become the envy of a nation that is the envy of the world.

We must not let this opportunity pass us by.

Fox is CEO and owner of Marble King in Paden City.

by Aaron Kendeall
Staff Writer
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Washington Co.

500 attend DEP hearing on Smith compressor station

Wednesday, May 1, 2013

James Rosenberg of Grindstone addresses Mark West and DEP officials during a public hearing Wednesday on the planned expansion of a Smith Township compressor station.

Residents filled the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall on Run Street to participate in the hearing.

About 500 people showed up Wednesday for a hearing held by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection on the planned expansion of a natural gas compression station in Smith Township. Residents filled the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall on Run Street to capacity in order to provide testimony as part of the permit approval process for the MarkWest facility.

“I know that if this many of you would come out and miss the Penguins game, that this issue must be important to you,” said Robert McHale, MarkWest public relations director.

Representatives from MarkWest opened the meeting with a short presentation explaining the planned alteration to the plant.

Nathan Wheldon, environmental manager for MarkWest, said the company planned to expand the site’s capability from two engines to as many as 10 in order to meet demand. He highlighted the various safety features of the plant, including daily inspections, regular equipment checks, maintenance and technological improvements like flash and gas detectors.

Wheldon assured the crowd the plant would be built to meet the industry’s highest technological standards.

“If these detectors see anything out of order, the plant will shut down before anything else happens,” Wheldon said.

The public meeting was announced after MarkWest’s application for the expansion caused the DEP to receive a number of public comments. Following the presentation by Wheldon and McHale, members of the public were asked to speak. A court reporter was present to record the testimony as part of the official record.

Although DEP and MarkWest representatives were not permitted to answer residents' comments or questions directly, DEP officials said they would answer in writing as part of a "comment and response document" made available on Pennsylvania Bulletin, the commonwealth's outlet for public information.

Members of the audience were split, with a slightly larger portion of the presenters in favor of the gas industry.

Veronica Coptis, community organizer for the Center for Coalfield Justice in Washington, said many of the emission levels laid out in the permit application would be harmful to residents.

"The Smith compressor would be one of the largest in the county," Coptis said. The planned expansion "produced an increased risk for formaldehyde exposure ... We're opposed to emissions of these known carcinogens.

"The voices of the citizens of Washington County should be considered above industry interests."

Alex Paris, of Avella, was one of the many residents in favor of the natural gas industry. He drew a contrast with previous oil and coal exploitation.

"In this area, we've been heavily affected by coal," Paris said. "Now, we have a chance to do it the right way because of new technology."

State Sen. Tim Solobay, D-Canonsburg, also said the impact of Marcellus Shale exploration was good for the area.

“Natural gas is having a positive environmental impact,” Solobay said, pointing to a federal study that claimed air pollution had decreased between 2005 and 2011. “This trend can only improve air quality, not only in our region, but in the country as a whole.”

Attorney John Smith, solicitor for Robinson Township, shared a petition signed by 20 residents of that municipality voicing air quality concerns.

“Many of the people (of Robinson Township) live in low-lying areas,” Smith said. “Many of these chemicals tend to lay in low levels.”

Smith said similar compression stations elsewhere in the country have utilized electric engines instead of the 1,980-horsepower, natural-gas-burning engines the Smith compressor would employ. He said the electric engines had less of an air quality impact because they emitted fewer pollutants. In addition to formaldehyde, volatile organic compounds were also singled out as especially harmful.

“These are known cancer-causing agents that can affect these individuals,” Smith said.

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----- Original Message -----

From: [Frack Check WV](#)

To: dcsoinks@comcast.net

Sent: Thursday, May 02, 2013 3:01 AM

Subject: Gas Industry “Buries” Fracking’s True Dangers

Gas Industry “Buries” Fracking’s True Dangers Says Tom Wilber

By [EcoWatch](#), April 30, 2013

Author and journalist **Tom Wilber** doesn’t take sides on whether the risks of **fracking** outweigh its rewards. But as a reporter, he does have strong feelings about the issue of transparency. “And often, this puts me on the same side of the fence as the anti-fracking activists,” Wilber said in an April 23 speech at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Wilber, author of the 2012 book ***Under the Surface: Fracking, Fortunes and the Fate of the Marcellus Shale***, said the natural gas industry is different than almost every other type of industry in terms of the exemptions and the nondisclosure agreements under which it operates. All of this secrecy, “doesn’t give people a true idea of what all of the risks are,” he explained. “And part of my job is to show what the industry is rather than just the glossy public relations image of itself.”

Methane migration is a particularly hot-button issue in the overall discussion on fracking. Wilber has written extensively on the topic and understands that methane does occur naturally in water wells. But as for Dimock, PA, one of the battleground towns where the industry and local residents have fought over the issue of methane migration, Wilber **reminds his readers** that the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)—often perceived by anti-fracking activists as a friend of industry—concluded that the methane polluting the aquifer under the town was thermogenic, from deeper producing formations, rather than biogenic or naturally occurring gas that collects in shallow seeps.

Residents in Dimock and in towns across the country have found thermogenic gas in their water where drilling is taking place. The gas industry typically blames methane migration on naturally occurring circumstances and often ignores findings to the contrary. “It is an insidious thing about the approach the gas industry is taking to this, which is to try to muddle things, rather than to try to be accountable for things,” Wilber said at the event, sponsored by **Green GW**, a student environmental group. “There is this defensive, ‘We didn’t do it, it’s always been there,’ type of approach.”

For example, according to DEP records, Dimock resident Norma Fiorentino’s water well exploded in early 2009 as a result of production gas, not naturally occurring methane, leaking into an aquifer and moving into her well, Wilber told the audience. “So when the industry said, ‘This is just a problem that’s always been around,’ it’s really confusing the issue,” he said.

The hardback edition of *Under the Surface* was released about a year ago; the paperback edition is scheduled to be published soon. With an absorbing narrative and solid reporting, the book has been well-received by industry officials, residents and anti-fracking activists alike.

“There are people who live directly over this resource who never knew they lived over a major natural gas resource or oil resource,” he said.

While Pennsylvania and West Virginia rushed into fracking, **New York has taken a cautious approach** due in large part to the organizing efforts of anti-fracking activists. “New York is unique in that it is the only state with this type of resource underneath that has not gone ahead to allow it to be exploited,” Wilber said. “New York has become something of a showcase of the anti-fracking movement.”

The fact that part of the Marcellus Shale is located in the New York City watershed helped to invigorate the movement. “At the beginning, the awareness wasn’t there of the magnitude of all of this,” he said. “But once people started getting their mind around the fact that the New York City watershed was under a prime drilling zone, it raised a lot of opposition that we have to put the brakes on.”

“If you’re Gov. Cuomo and you have this critical mass of local and city elected officials saying, ‘We don’t want it,’ that’s going to send a message,” Wilber said.

NOTE: The book entitled *The End of Country* by Seamus McGraw describes the impacts of drilling and fracking generally on the region including Sesquehanna County in Pennsylvania. The WV Surface Owners Rights Organization carries an article on [The Industrialization of Rural West Virginia](#) on their web-site [WVsoro.org](#).